

# HOLIDAY PARTIES AND GIFTS

## GIFTS AND INVITATIONS

### **Are there any limits on gifts employees may accept during the holidays?**

- Yes; an employee may not accept a gift given because of the employee's Government position, or from someone with interests before the Department, unless it is based on a personal relationship or is less than \$20 in value (and the total of all gifts from the same donor that year is \$50 or less).

### **May Federal employees accept invitations to holiday parties?**

- Yes, but invitations may be accepted from someone with interests before the Department only if (1) based on a personal relationship, (2) \$20 or less in value, or (3) to a "widely-attended" event—one with a large number and broad range of persons attending at which it will be possible to discuss matters of mutual interest—and a supervisor approves attendance upon determining that attendance will serve an agency purpose that outweighs appearance problems. Approval is not appropriate for events that are primarily entertainment in nature.

## GIFTS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES

### **Are there any limits on collecting money for an office holiday party?**

- Office parties are permitted, but participation must be voluntary. No one may be coerced into participating, but those attending may be required to contribute a set amount to offset costs.

### **May co-workers exchange gifts?**

- Yes, provided that all persons are participating voluntarily. Supervisors may participate in mutual gift exchanges (such as a "secret Santa" exchange), but it would be advisable to limit the value of gifts to no more than \$10 if supervisors and subordinates will be exchanging gifts.

### **May Federal employees give holiday gifts to supervisors or collect funds for such gifts from co-workers?**

- Yes, but the amount is limited. Employees may give gifts to a supervisor on an occasional basis, including on a holiday, provided that the value of the gift (not just the contribution) is \$10 or less and there was no coercion.

*Prepared by the Ethics Division, Office of the Assistant General Counsel for Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce – January 2, 2004*  
**FOR ADVICE ON THIS TOPIC, CALL THE ETHICS DIVISION AT (202) 482-5384**

**A WORD ABOUT ETHICS**